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The Incentive Value of Social Approval and Behavior in Small Groups

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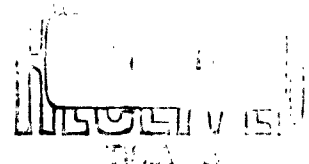
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In order to explore the relationship between approval-seeking motivation and individual patterns of behavior in small groups, a measure of the incentive value of interpersonal approval and disapproval for an individual was correlated with observations of behavior in four-man discussion groups. The SRS (McDavid, 1962) was used to assess approval needs, and a schema adapted from Bales' Interaction Process Analysis (1950) was employed in categorizing observed behavior as (A) positive social-emotional acts, (B) information-giving, (C) information-seeking, or (D) negative social-emotional acts. Approval-seeking motivation was found to be unrelated to either category of social-emotional ("maintenance function") behavior, but was correlated negatively with information-giving and positively with information-seeking for females, though not for males. For females, approval-seeking motivation was correlated negatively with an index of tendency to be active and directing, as opposed to passive and submissive, in task-related activity.

## The Incentive Value of Social Approval and Behavior in Small Groups

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Individual differences in response to social reinforcement in the form of approval and disapproval have been noted for some time, and recently attempts have been made to assess these differences. The tendency to endorse socially desirable items in a personality inventory has been construed as a measure of approval-seeking motivation, and has been found to be significantly related to conformity to group pressures (Strickland and Crowne, 1962), expression of favorable attitudes toward a boring task (Marlowe & Crowne, 1961), susceptibility to verbal conditioning under social reinforcement (Crowne & Strickland, 1961), and the tendency to inhibit the display of aggression following frustration (Allison & Hunt, 1959). In a recent monograph, McDavid (1962) has described the development of a more specific measure of approval-seeking motivation independent of the conventionality and concern for adherence to cultural norms which are reflected in social desirability measures such as that employed by Crowne, Marlowe, and Strickland. This scale, the Social Reinforcement Scale (SRS), was found to correlate significantly with a pattern of descriptive personality measures which validate conceptualization of the variable which it measures as an index of approval-seeking tendencies, shyness, anxiety about social relationships, and acceptance-seeking.

In view of the relevance of such motivation to behavior in interpersonal relationships, the present study was undertaken as an exploration of patterns of behavior displayed by individuals in small discussion groups as a function of approval-seeking motivation.

### Method

Subjects. Ss for this investigation were 102 undergraduates (97 males and 42 females) in introductory courses in Psychology who volunteered under promise of additional grade-point credit for participation in psychological research experiments. Most were sophomores and were generally unsophisticated about psychological testing and research since they were enrolled in their first course in Psychology.

Assessment of Approval-seeking Motivation: Motivation to seek social approval was assessed by means of the Social Reinforcement Scale (SRS) described in a recent monograph (McDavid, 1962). The SRS is a 20-item scale, scored by weighting of degree of agreement (endorsement) with statements describing high regard for the reward value of interpersonal approval or disapproval, or disagreement (non-endorsement) with statements describing indifference to interpersonal approval and disapproval as rewards. Weighted scores may range from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicative of greater incentive value of social reinforcement for the individual. Test-retest reliability (over a one-week interval) for the SRS has been established at .90, and the measure has been found to relate significantly to rate of verbal conditioning under social reinforcement, as well as to a stable pattern of descriptive personality measures. The SRS was administered within a larger battery of psychological tests in groups ranging in size from four to over fifty.

Observation of Behavior in Small Groups: Ss were assigned randomly to groups of four members each and scheduled to meet at an appointed time. Absences of individual subjects made it necessary to observe several three-man groups, but since there was no evidence of differences in behavior

in the group as a function of its size, the data were pooled. All groups were constituted of members of the same sex. Each group convened in a room furnished with a table and four chairs. They were instructed via tape recording to discuss for 25 minutes any aspects of the total operation of their University which they considered to be in need of improvement. At the end of the discussion, they were given five minutes to compile a list of recommended solutions to the problems considered. An attempt was made to word the instructions to the subjects in a manner which emphasized "task-functions" and "maintenance-functions" (Bass, 1960) as equally important. No attempt was made to conceal the fact that they were being observed from a screened observation booth or that their conversation was being recorded, and they were informed frankly that the experimenter was interested in group behavior.

During this thirty minute period, an observer recorded their overt and verbal behavior in pre-determined categories, using a modification of Leies' Interaction Process Analysis (Bales, 1950). Instead of classifying behavior according to the twelve categories described by Bales, these were collapsed into four broader categories identified as A (Positive social-emotional behavior), B (Attempted Answers), C (Questions), and D (Negative social-emotional behavior). This procedure is in accord with Bales' conceptualization. According to the Bales scheme, behaviors classified in categories A and D are of a social-emotional nature and are thus particularly related to group organization, integration, and cohesiveness. Cattell (1951) has discussed this area of group function as "maintenance synergy," while Thibaut and Kelley (1959) have referred to it as "maintenance functions". Similarly, behaviors classified in

categories B and C have to do with the group's task or purpose. Cattell (1951) has described this area of behavior in groups as a function of "effective synergy", and Thibaut & Kelley (1959) refer to it as "task functions".

To establish each participant's score within each category of observation, a ratio between the number of acts classified within a given category and the total number of observed acts for that individual was utilized. This procedure controlled for differences in level of activity. Thus each individual obtained four proportion scores (A, B, C, and D) totalling 1.00. In addition, the ratios  $B/B+C$  (the proportion of task-related acts which reflected the giving of information and direction) and  $A/A+D$  (the proportion of social-emotional acts which reflected agreement, acceptance, and general fostering of interpersonal harmony) were derived. In order to insure normality, all distributions were transformed to T-scores, according to the procedure outlined by McCall (1939). Product-moment correlations between each of these six scores, as well as the total number of acts initiated by each subject, and scores on the SRS were then computed.



#### Results

While no relationships between SRS scores and behavioral measures were obtained for the sample of males, Category B scores (giving information, suggestions, or direction) correlated <sup>negatively</sup> ( $r = -.31$ ,  $p < .05$ ), Category C (asking for information, suggestions, or direction) correlated positively ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and index B/B+C (reflecting the degree of assertive, directive, and informative behavior as contrasted with inquiry and direction-seeking) correlated negatively ( $r = -.38$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with SRS scores for females. Of these, only the B/B+C correlation with the SRS was significantly different within sex groups ( $p < .05$ ).

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Insert Table 1 about here

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#### Discussion

In previously reported studies involving the SRS in which male and female samples were employed (McDavid, 1962), generally consistent, though not identical, patterns of relationships between SRS scores and psychometric scales for both sexes have been observed. For females, the Social Reinforcement Scale has been found to correlate positively with the Abasement scale of the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (Edwards, 1959), the Support scale of the Survey of Interpersonal Values (Gordon, 1960), and the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale (Taylor, 1953); the SRS correlates negatively with the Ascendance, Sociability, Emotional Stability, Objectivity, and General Activity scales of the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey (Guilford and Zimmerman, 1949). For males, the SRS scores

correlated positively with the Succorance and Abasement scales of the EPPS, the Recognition scale of the SIV, and the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale; the SRS correlates negatively with the Dominance scale of the EPPS, the Leadership scale of the SIV, and the Ascendancy, Sociability, Emotional Stability, and Objectivity scales of the G-Z Survey. Only one scale, the Dominance scale of the EPPS, was found to generate significantly different correlations for males ( $r = -.44$ ) and females ( $r = -.03$ ).

The findings reported here suggest that when interacting with other members of a discussion group (and particularly in directly task-related behavior), women who display relatively strong approval-seeking tendencies are inclined to be relatively dependent, inquiring, and direction-seeking, while tending not to initiate guidance, direction or influence on other members of the group. While it might seem plausible that the A/A+D index (reflecting a tendency to avoid antagonizing others and to foster warm interpersonal relationships) and SRS scores should be related, this index was uncorrelated with the scale. The magnitude of the A/A+D index is largely dependent upon the proportion of behavioral acts in Category A, which includes acts directed primarily toward fostering congeniality, cohesiveness, and interpersonal warmth (agreement, nodding, open laughter, etc.). The conceptualization of the variable(s)

measured by the SRS includes shyness and anxiety about social relationships; thus high scores on the SRS are not necessarily compatible with high degrees of participation even in A category activities.

The differential patterns of relationship for males and females observed here elaborate several previous observations of sex differences in approval-seeking tendencies as measured by the SRS. (McDavid, 1962).

Scores for women are consistently higher than for men, and extended analyses of this sex difference indicate that it is due primarily to the tendency of females to respond differently to six items which are generally aligned with the stereotypical female sex role.

Docility, dependency, and sensitivity to criticism, personal affront, and embarrassment are socially acceptable correlates of femininity, but are generally undesirable characteristics for the male in this culture. In line with this, a significant negative correlation between SRS scores and the Masculinity-femininity scale of the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey ( $r = -.31$ ) has been observed for a sample of 102 college men and women. Thus, it may be that predictive utility of the SRS will differ consistently for males and females.

#### Summary

In order to explore the relationship between approval-seeking motivation and individual patterns of behavior in small groups, a measure of the incentive value of interpersonal approval and disapproval for an individual was correlated with observations of behavior in four-man discussion groups. The SRS (McDavid, 1962) was used to assess approval needs, and a schema adapted from Bale's Interaction Process Analysis (1950) was employed in categorizing observed behavior as (A) positive social-emotional acts, (B) information-giving, (C) information-seeking, or (D) negative social-emotional acts. Approval-seeking motivation was found to be unrelated to either category of social-emotional ("maintenance function") behavior, but was correlated negatively with information-giving and positively with information-seeking for females, though not for males. For females, approval-seeking

motivation was correlated negatively with an index of tendency to be active and directing, as opposed to passive and submissive, in task-related activity.

Table 1

Product-moment correlations between SRS scores and observational measures  
of group behavior

Observational measure	Males (n = 97)	Females (n = 42)
Total number of acts	-.03	-.06
Category A	+.03	+.07
Category B	-.01	-.31*
Category C	-.02	+.32*
Category D	+.06	+.20
B/B+C	.00	-.38*
A/A+D	-.06	-.14

\*  $p < .05$

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